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ABSTRACT

This paper employs an autobiographical method using biographical elements from narrated experiences from Cyprus, Saudi Arabia, and the United States, where she has come to study. The paper offers perspectives on the September 11, 2001 tragedy and other acts of terrorism, violence, and mass destruction. It describes how the author's Cyprus experience was revived through the U.S. experience on the 11th of September, and through familiarity with the status quo that exists in Islamic countries, based on the Islamic law, giving a different perspective on issues of violence. Postmodernism directs people toward giving answers to this and other questions using multiple lenses, and respecting multiple meanings and perspectives. The paper briefly states a thesis regarding the controversial issue of whether violence should be discussed at schools. The intent of the paper is not to criticize or judge, but rather to respond to all those who think they know more, who view things from one perspective, who say that others do not care. The paper is addressed to people who have experienced the tragedy of September 11th, as well as other tragedies as a result of violence and terrorism. It is also addresses educators who are concerned with issues of violent behavior in the world. (Author/BT)

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SAUDI ARABIA, CYPRUS, AMERICA AND THE WORLD: SEPTEMBER 11th FROM ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE.

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Abstract

In this essay, through autobiographical methods and using also biographical elements, I narrate my experiences from Cyprus, my home country, from Saudi Arabia, where I have lived for ten years, and from America, where I have come to study. Through the events that I have first hand experienced in all three countries I offer a perspective from which the tragedy of the 11th of September, as well as other acts of terrorism, violence, and mass destruction can be viewed. I describe how my Cyprus experience was revived through the American experience on the 11th of September. Being familiar, at the same time, with the status quo that exists in Islamic countries, based on the intolerant Islamic law, I try to give a new perspective on issues of violence. My purpose is to send out the message that America is not the only country that has experienced a catastrophe. Each country did, in one way or another. I also encourage people to see beyond situations and events, and beyond the boundaries of their countries, to see the tragedies other countries have experienced, and listen to other peoples' opinions. Do they really hate us? Why? Postmodernism is the trend of our era and it directs us toward giving answers to this and other questions using multiple lenses, acknowledging the problematic situations in which we find ourselves, and respecting multiple meanings and perspectives. Finally, I briefly state my thesis regarding the controversial issue of whether violence should be discussed at schools. My intention with this paper is not to criticize or judge, rather it is to show how I have experienced September 11th and its aftermath having lived in an intolerant Islamic country, having experienced and still experiencing the occupation of my country and the indifference other countries show because of political and economic issues, interests, and issues of power. It is my response to all those who think that they know everything, who view things from one perspective, who say that others do not care. It is my response to schooling and teaching issues. It is addressed to all people who have experienced the tragedy of September 11th as well as other tragedies as a result of violence and terrorism. It is also addressed to educators who are concerned with issues of violent behavior in the world.

I grew up hating Turks. Does this make me a bad person?

The Turks didn't worry when they forced some hundred thousand people out of their homes. To me they are criminals and thieves. They committed a crime when they invaded Cyprus, my country. They were saving Turkish-Cypriots? A lie. They are murderers of my people, thousands and thousands of them. They raped a lot of women and did numerous heinous things to the people of my country. They are thieves because they stole the houses, properties, the inheritance and the villages, places where we were born, including my parents, grandparents, my loved ones.

My grandma's stories bring my village to life, like I have lived there. I've never gone because I'm not allowed to, so I know how their village looked, and their house, through the narrations of my grandmother. "Their house is like this and like that…someday, when you go back, if I'm not alive, go and find it. It's ours, it's yours". She describes my parents' house in detail, so that when we go back we can recognize it.

She is afraid that many more years will pass until there will be a solution. She is afraid that nobody from the generations before ours will be alive to indicate to us our properties and all the things that legally belong to us. "Your parents built their house with a lot of efforts in 1970, one year after they got married. But they didn't manage to live a happy life in there and realize their dreams, dreams that every newly married couple has, as they were creating them together with the building of their house. Three years later they were forced to abandon it and together with it to abandon their dreams and their lives. But no matter how many years will elapse, all the things we left "over there" will still be there, waiting for our return. And if we are not alive then you will go and find them. So, listen to me carefully. This is very important. Their house is very close to Lapitho's gymnasium. In order to go there you pass in front of the coffeehouse and this shop and that building. You take this road and you turn to that old, narrow street, and then… It is painted in white color, and it is very big. It is surrounded by a huge piece of land where we have planted all the kinds of citrus trees, such as lemon trees and orange trees…" And then I interrupt her to ask her naively, "Do you think that everything has remained the same, granny?" "Yes, because Turks cannot destroy these things, as much as they try, because they are patiently waiting for us". And then she goes on to describe to me her house, where she lived with her husband. "My house was the pride of the village. It was very old and made of stone. There were many ancient heirlooms, and thus the museum took it under its supervision and it proclaimed it as a preservative building. It was a two-story building, built on a hill. From the second floor you could see the view of the whole village. My bedroom was at the second floor and from the balcony one could see the sea as it extended to the horizon…" And she keeps going and going. Her stories are so descriptive that I can visualize everything that she talks about.

My grandmother knows deep inside that she may never see her home again. She knows that she is very old and time goes so fast. And every day that passes by does not bring any solution to the Cyprus problem. But hope is always in her heart. It is there, lit constantly, for almost thirty years now. The only thing she hopes for is to have freedom in our country. She wants to go to her village before she dies. "Tell me that I can go back there… I can walk on my knees if necessary, and then if it is to die, let me die", she says very often. I love when she tells me these stories, I get excited but then I want to cry with her. I can go there, only if I sign a paper recognizing their fake government. I would never do that. I would never betray my country like that. Memories are better.

My dad's feelings are somewhat contrary. He does not talk a lot about the things they have lost. But I know that he suffers a lot. I can see the pain in his eyes every time he sees a picture from his village or listens to a song or a poem about our occupied places, or when he tells us stories about his childhood. "No matter how many places you visit, no matter how lucky you feel you are, or how nice a time you think you have I can only tell you that you are unlucky, because you haven't seen the most beautiful place in the world. Nothing compares to our village. There were the most beautiful beaches, the clearest sea, crystal-clear water running out of the mountains, clean air, and one could smell the various aromas that were spreading in the air from the fields and the citrus trees. We had the most beautiful and carefree time of our lives there." Before the invasion, my father used to be a police officer. His family used to be very wealthy. After the invasion they lost whatever they possessed and they had to move to the free part of Cyprus in order to survive and start their lives all over again. My parents moved from

place to place and changed jobs in order to see what was the best for them to do. Finally they decided that Cyprus could not offer them a lot of opportunities to rebuild their life, so they decided to move abroad. "I can live anywhere now that I lost everything... Every place now is the same to me", is what my father always says.

My mother also talks to me about her experiences from the invasion. A quote from Tolstoy's book *Divine and Human and other stories* (2000) brings in my mind my mother's misfortune. "As happens in ...decisive moments in life, in an instant she experienced a mass of feelings and thoughts but at the same time did not yet understand, did not believe her own misfortune" (p. 30). "That day I woke up very early in the morning. It was still dawn. I just couldn't sleep any more because it was really hot. The window in my bedroom was wide open but it didn't help at all. Not even the leaves from the trees were moving. Your father was on duty from the previous night, and your brother, who was three years old, was sleeping. So I decided to take a shower to feel better. When I was done I went to my bedroom to check on your brother who was sleeping next to the window. That window had the best view; you could see the endless sea. I stared out of the window for a while, until I saw something really weird on the sky. I could distinguish something black far away, like black smoke, coming toward us. Then looking at the same direction I noticed that there was also a black spot in the sea. I wondered what that was but then without paying further attention I just shut the window. Few minutes later I heard a constant, deafening noise like somebody was bombarding us. When I opened the window I saw hundreds of military airplanes setting fire against us, and ships that were disembarking thousands and thousands of soldiers. I was panicked. I was petrified. I was terrified. I didn't know what to do or what to think of. I didn't know what was going on. I grabbed the baby from his bed unconsciously...I stopped to think what to do...I couldn't. I felt relieved when I heard your grandmother calling me, desperately, while she was coming down the road, running, toward the house. 'Take the baby and let's get out of here before they kill us. It is war', were her words which to me sounded like a very bad dream. We started running from building to building trying not to go into any open space. We were hiding. We were scared for our lives. I was mostly concerned about the baby. I was holding him very tide in my arms trying to protect him with my body. We were running and I was so scared and exhausted. Your grandmother was at the front and I was behind her with your brother. We were running and together with us hundreds of other people. Finally, we got to a river and we lied down there. The water was shallow enough not to cover us. I put the baby at the bottom and then I fell on him to cover him. Around us I could hear screams, crying, confusion, desperation, panic, and the gun throwing, the bullets that were passing over our heads, and the bombs. For a moment I thought of my husband and got terrified because I hadn't heard of him. I thought of my parents, my siblings, my loved ones. I thought of my house and that I didn't lock the door. I thought of the washed clothes that were hanging on the line outside of the house. I thought of...when a sudden scream from my mother in law brought me back to the reality. 'The baby...the baby, he is going to die from asphyxia. Get off him right away'. I didn't notice that the water had covered him and he couldn't breathe. He couldn't react because I was on top of him. His face turned black. I was so scared. If your grandmother hadn't noticed him he would have died. We stayed there for many hours. We still didn't know what was going on, but different rumors were saying that Turks had invaded the island. We didn't know what they wanted and how far they

could go. The biggest relief that I felt was when I heard your father's voice. Somehow he found out where we were and he came. He told us that he was helping people, but now, it was the army's responsibility. He told us that we had to leave right away and move to a safer place because we were in the war zone. We didn't even stop by our house to take our things with us. We left just like that. We took no clothes, no shoes, no pictures. We thought that this would end pretty soon and then we would be able to return. We were wrong. Twenty-nine years, and we are still waiting…"

Narrations sound like fairytale and then they become memories. Memories are what I have been left with. Sweet memories of our house, our village, the place where my parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, a whole generation grew up and had the most beautiful years of their life "over there". I keep these memories like an amulet, like precious stones, as thousands of other people do.

The story of the "Dust Bowl" brings strong memories to my mind. In 1931 severe drought hit the Midwestern and southern plains in America. The crops started dying. Then the black blizzards began. Dust from the over-plowed and over-grazed land began to blow. Year after year the number of dust storms was increasing. In May of 1934 great dust storms spread from the Dust Bowl area. The drought was the worst ever in U.S. history, covering more than seventy-five percent of the country and affecting twenty-seven states severely. Drought and dust storms lasted for eight years (PBS). Steinbeck (1999), inspired from this American experience, wrote his novel "The Grapes of Wrath". It is about the farmers who after their crops died had to abandon their homes and search for a better life at a place where they could rebuild their lives. There is a strong relationship between surviving the Dust Bowl and surviving the Turkish invasion. The black dust that covered the American sky was like the Turkish military planes that covered the blue sky of Cyprus. The forcing out of their houses hundreds of thousands of people in the areas affected severely by the dust storm was like the forcing out of their houses thousands of Cypriots by Turkish troops. The search for a new land, the land of promise, was also alike in both destructions. The sorrow, pain, desperation, fear of the unknown, hope followed by despair and then again hope, and mixed feelings and emotions that people experience in such cases are similar. At the same time there is a great difference, which overshadows any similarity. The difference is the intension, and the where the destruction comes from. In the first case it is a natural destruction and it is the case where we understand how small we are in the universe. In the second case it is a massive human destruction caused by humans and it is the case where we understand that hate, brainwash, and fanaticism take away from our humanity.

Is it irony to say that I am happy and that I consider my family lucky? None from our family is considered to be a "missing person". We didn't lose anyone from our family. Except from my grandfather who at some point was a prisoner. After one month, though, they let him go. Maybe I am ungrateful because after that I should say "thanks" to Turks for being so generous for letting my grandpa go and for giving me the chance to meet him. They didn't kill anybody from my family. "Refugees" is the other name that we have. Most of the other families cry for their missing persons and for their dead persons. Am I happy in the unhappiness of others? Am I lucky in the fate of others?

As I said at the beginning, I grew up hating Turks. But I don't hate them as much as did the people who lived through the catastrophe of 1974. I was born three-and-a-half years after the invasion. My bitter feelings get stronger year by year on certain days: July

20th and August 14th when the bad memories come alive. On those dates my island is covered under a blanket of sadness, while the other third celebrates its glory. At the one side we watch on television documentaries that remind us of the sad days of the invasion, showing in black and white color over and over again how this tragedy occurred, interviewing people who survived the invasion, and people who still suffer from the devastation. On the radio people discuss the events, and patriotic songs and poems are being played. Also, shows with politicians analyzing our national problem are being broadcasted. On the streets demonstrations take place. At the other side of the island the Turks celebrate their achievement with parades, fireworks, and activities aiming in the irritation of the Greek-Cypriots. At the same time, they do not forget to paint, repaint, and highly maintain the Turkish flag they have constructed on the slope of Pentadaktilos, a mountain in Cyprus that is now occupied by the Turks. Pentadaktilos Mountain is clearly visible from many points of the capital city, at the free side. The stone-flag is huge and as soon as its colors become pale they paint it again with brighter colors to make sure that we can all see it. They strive to remind us every moment that they are the lords of the other side and that their hegemony is alive and strong. The inscription under the flag says, "I am proud that I am Turk". And I respond that I am proud I am Greek-Cypriot and above all human, with pride, feelings, heart, and soul.

The sad thing is that for Turks things are the way they think they should be. For them there isn't any issue such as occupation of a country that belongs to others, that is the Greeks and the Greek-Cypriots. This is obvious from relevant discussions with them about the Cyprus problem. Many times when we discuss with them they deny that Cyprus is a Greek island, insisting that it is, as always was, part of Turkey. Another evidence of this is that while surfing the Internet, I find data and information that are seductive and manipulate the history of the island. They try to change the reality by building websites through which they offer information to serve their interests. They advertise parts of the occupied Cyprus as Turkish places, they present ancient cultural monuments and other treasures from the Greek culture as Turkish, and they try to attract tourists in this way for economic purposes. In this way they also prevent the international community from learning the truth, but this is part of their politics. Once, I had found myself chatting on the Internet with a Turk. When I told him I was Cypriot he told me that he is very proud of what his people did to my people, that we deserve it, since Cyprus belongs to Turkey, and that we should be thankful for they did not occupy the whole island. He also told me that he was so proud of the bloodshed. He had the insolence to call my people murderers, because, as he said, we slaughtered his people in 1974. How can some thousand of soldiers put it up with millions of fanatics? Probably this is what they learn at school.

A proclamation by Themis (HEC, 2002), a project of the Hellenic Electronic Center, reads "Washington-USA July 20, 2002. The following Proclamation is put forward for the purpose of remembering the events of July 1974 which saw the overthrow of Cypriot democracy and which culminated in the first Turkish invasion of Cyprus on July 20, 1974. We seek to bring before state legislatures around the country resolutions recognizing the Turkish invasion of Cyprus as an act of aggression. We seek to remember in these resolutions that thirty-seven percent of the Republic of Cyprus is under Turkish occupation. We seek to remember that over 200,000 Greek Cypriots were ethnically cleansed from their homes and that over 1,600 Greek Cypriots are still missing.

We seek to remember that human rights are still violated in Cyprus. We seek to remember that the Republic of Turkey is involved in the sponsorship of terrorism in Cyprus as can be demonstrated by the activity of the Grey Wolves in the occupied territories of Cyprus. We seek to remember that Greek Cypriot homes and property are being taken by Turkish settlers who are being used by Ankara for the purpose of making the ethnic cleansing of the occupied territories irreversible. We seek to remember the destruction of the religious heritage of Cyprus. We remember the destruction of the Cypriot Churches and Monasteries and the theft of Byzantine Icons and Mosaics. We seek to bring these facts to the attention state legislatures across the country…". Twenty-nine years later and we are still waiting, hoping and praying. These are the things they will never steal from us because they can't. They can't steal our soul, our dreams, our heart and our pride. I can't believe that so much injustice can exist. And I know that people always take what they deserve and things, at some point, return to where they belong.

After Berlin, Nicosia is now the only divided capital in Europe. After Berlin… Freedom will come to Nicosia…like Berlin.

But for now I have to live with my fate. When I came to America to study I searched for an assistantship in order to make things easier for my parents. Before I got my job as a graduate assistant my boss asked me during the interview "Many times you will have to speak to and assist Turks. Will you be able to handle that? What will your behavior be towards them?" "Is this a question or a trap?" I thought. I help them. I cannot do otherwise. Whenever I have to be of assistance to Turks I wonder "why me? Why did it happen when I was available to help the next person, this next person to be a Turk?" But I just do not show my emotions. I just try to do my job, and be polite as I am with all customers. But I am not warm and friendly with them. I treat them like they are lifeless creatures. If I suspect that the persons I am dealing with are Turks then I look for their nationality in their folder and I confirm it. And then I notice that most of them are trying to see my name on my nametag. Why? To make sure that their assumption about my nationality is correct? All I want to do is to shout that "I am Greek, I'm Greek-Cypriot. Didn't you recognize me? Do you want to say anything? Are you proud of what you did to my country?" I think, well, "Maybe it's not their fault, fanatics as they are, but that of their politicians'. The majority of them are uneducated. They are shortsighted. They can only see straight and up to a point. I feel sorry for them".

It's ironic how things can turn to be. I never imagined that at some point of my life I would have to confront a situation where I would have to help my enemies. I never imagined that I would have to answer questions regarding my national identity and my feelings about Turks in order to get a job.

I shouldn't be unthankful. I lost something but I earned much more. If it wasn't for them I wouldn't have known what sorrow is, how feelings of losing something in such an unjust way are, I wouldn't have lived in Saudi Arabia, I wouldn't have to wait for the summers to meet with my relatives because they had to scatter all over the world. Probably I would have not been here in Chicago. I wouldn't have the life and the experiences I have now. We wouldn't have enriched our national vocabulary with words such as "refugees", "missing persons", "prisoners", "killed people", "invasion", "1974", and a thousand other words.

Is this the price we have to pay? Is it that we can't have everything? Is it either this or that? If this is the case, then I wish I had never done all this, as far as I could have my country back, as a whole. Or is it just the way things should be? Maybe it's just because we need to take a lesson, that of respect of our country and that of others, of appreciation of whatever we have, of valuing events, situations, people, life, small moments and big ones, goodness, freedom, and all universal, pan-humanitarian values. And after we take this lesson we may have back what belongs to us.

After the invasion my father decided to work abroad in order to give his family, us, a better future. His family was rich and my father was going to inherit a big wealth, but he lost everything after the invasion, as his family and some other thousands of people did. After that, after they lost each and every materialistic thing they possessed, both my father and mother viewed education as the vehicle for a better life, which whoever possesses it, is in advantageous position, and is equipped with the biggest and most precious treasure in the world. "Education is the only tool that nobody can take away from you. It is food for the soul, the spirit, and the mind and the key that opens doors in your life". Therefore, their aspiration was to make a new beginning in a country that would offer my dad the possibility to work hard and save money in order to give us a better life through our education. That country was Saudi Arabia. Now as an adult, I share their view about education, too. At the same time I know that except from enabling my studies, Saudi Arabia offered me unique and unforgettable experiences.

Saudi Arabia is a country with a lot of restrictions. My experience there made me conclude that people there are not human beings with free will, free spirit and autonomy. Both citizens and foreigners have to respect the Islamic law and act according to the Koran. Women are not considered to be free human beings and therefore they do not have rights. They are not allowed to drive, to wear whatever they want and especially to have any part of their body exposed. That's why they wear those black, long-sleeve, long dresses and they have their hair and their faces covered. Alcohol is restricted there for everybody. During the Ramadan, a fast that is carried out during the ninth month of the year in the Muslim calendar, not only the Muslims, but foreigners as well have the obligation not to eat or drink anything from sunrise to sunset. People are not free to choose religion or to have their own beliefs. Islam and Koran is the lighthouse of their lives and their only orientation as well. People must obey to the authority and respect their king. Whoever disobeys put their life into risk, since conviction to death is the most popular kind of punishment. Beheading is the way they take away one's life and they do it at public places so that the rest of the people can take a lesson. I remember that night. We were taking a ride with the car. I was six years old at the time. The plaza was crowded and screams were heard. I asked my father what was going on. He told me that they were executing somebody.

They do not want tourists in their country, because tourists carry different beliefs, attitudes, viewpoints, ideas, thoughts, values, culture, way of life and religion. The authority wants to keep its people in darkness, whereas tourism disorients them. That's why it is so difficult to go to this country, and that's why foreigners can work there only if they are willing to respect its regulations.

In spite of this fact I admit that the best years of my childhood were during the years we were in Saudi Arabia. When you are child the main thing you care of is to have friends to play with. And I had that. We used to live in compounds, with lots of other

Greeks. I used to go to Greek schools. I had plenty of friends and every afternoon we used to play. Because of the weather, which is always warm and dry, we could play out all year round. We knew everyone in the compound. At least twice a year, on Christmas and Easter, the ladies would organize parties. They also organized feasts, festivals, different workshops and other activities, and contests with awards. Every summer we would go to Cyprus for vacation and see our friends and relatives.

I lived in Saudi Arabia for ten years, so I spent my childhood and grew up there. What I experienced I will never forget. It was a collection of unique and interesting experiences deriving from a whole different civilization, culture, religion, ethics, traditions, and language other than mine, and of unforgettable memories. Things I would have never known if I hadn't lived there. Or things I would most likely have never believed if somebody else had narrated them to me, instead of experiencing them first hand.

I remember an incident, which took place, I think, seventeen years ago. It was my father, my mother, my sister and I. My sister was seven and I was six. That night we decided to go shopping. We were getting ready for our summer holidays in Cyprus. After two hours walking at the streets where the shops were, my mom said, "Okay one more thing left and then we are going home" "Come on mom, we are tired. Do we have to buy presents for every relative we have in Cyprus? Let's go home. We are tired and it's very hot". In Saudi Arabia the temperature is extremely high and for that reason, the shops close during the noon and then open again at night. Despite what we said to our parents we kept walking because as my mom said "we don't have a lot of days left, so we need to buy everything tonight". All four of us had our hands full of bags. While we were walking my mom's scarf slipped from her head and her hair appeared. My mom had felt it but she couldn't put it back since her hands were full of bags. We couldn't help her either for the same reason she couldn't help herself. So she ignored it. We all did. That was until a Mattawan appeared. He was one of those persons who wear a white long-sleeve, long coat, and are policemen and religious persons at the same time. They are all over the country trying to punish whatever is illegal and against the Koran. They hold wooden sticks to hit those who violate the law of the Koran, as well as scissors and other stuff to help them take action. They drive cars with two- or three-digit license plates indicating that they are close relatives to the king. The Mattawan started walking toward us. Then he was walking behind us and he was grumbling. "What does he want? Is this sexual harassment?" my mom said. My sister and I couldn't understand what he was grumbling. "Watch out! He is ready to hit you with that wooden stick!" my father shouted. "His problem is that you don't wear your scarf properly and your hair is visible," he said. "Oh my God" my mom screamed. "What shall I do?" The next thing I remember is my mother, my sister and me running around the shelves and from aisle to aisle in a store, trying to get away from the Mattawan who was running after us with his wooden stick, which was ready to stop with impetus on our bodies. Then we were running up and down the stairs from floor to floor, all around the store. We were exhausted. We were carrying all those bags in our hands, too. We were ready to give up. We were hopeless. But it seems that we were very lucky because when we turned our heads back he wasn't there.

My father wasn't with us at that point. He did not follow us into the store. But this was for the best, since, being a foreigner, he wouldn't be able to do anything.

People, especially foreigners, do not have rights in that country. On the other hand, if my father had been with us it would have been worse, because either the Mattawan would be angrier, or my dad would not be able to control his temper and then he would end up in jail. That's probably the reason for which my father left us alone to "fight" with the Mattawan. The case is that if my mother had been caught, besides the fact that she would have been beaten, it is probable that she would have been left without hair too, since the Mattawan would have given her an immediate haircut. I'm not even sure if that was going to be for free. Anyway if not monetary, it would have had psychological cost.

Some other time we were out for shopping again, our main entertainment in Saudi Arabia. We were together with another friendly family. That night my mother was wearing her scarf. Unfortunately though the other lady forgot to take her scarf with her. That actually was a tragic mistake. She was condemned since it was a sin not to wear her scarf and not to hide her hair. When the Mattawan appeared, something we knew would happen, she was in trouble. We were in trouble as well, because she was with us. We went into a shop, once again, hoping that he would leave. He left, indeed. Before we left the shop she bought a scarf, just in case the same or another Mattawan would appear. Now she has at least two scarves. But that's all right; scarves are useful in Saudi Arabia.

In Saudi Arabia a man can only accompany a woman if he is married to her or if they are blood relatives. Also, a woman cannot be at the front seat of the car with a male driver with whom she is not related. The opposite of course cannot happen since women are not allowed to drive. In other words, if a woman wants to go somewhere with a man with whom she is not related, she has to sit on the back seat. That night it was Mr. Andy, my father, my mother, my sister and I. Mr. Andy, a family friend, was leaving for Cyprus a week later and he asked my mother to go with him for shopping in order to help him buy some things for his wife. So we decided to go all together. What I remember is the action part of our late night dash. At some point, as we were walking, my dad stayed behind all of us, my sister and I were in front of him, and my mother with Mr. Andy were at the front walking and talking. As soon as we saw a Mattawan we realized that we were in trouble again. It seems that we attracted them as the honey attracts the bears. The Mattawan approached Mr. Andy and he asked him if my mother was his wife, since they were walking together. He got confused and out of fear he said, "Yes she is" "Okay then, can I see your working permit and the marriage certification?" the Mattawan asked. My dad, without second thought ran towards them. "What did you tell him? Now you are going to be in trouble. Step back and let me talk. You are leaving in a week and you don't want them to put you in jail again". Mr. Andy was in jail the week before that for another stupid reason. "She is my wife", my dad said half English and half Arabic (after being there for so long he could speak some Arabic). "What exactly is your problem? Here is my working permit and my marriage certification. He is just a friend of the family". He let us go. And then we went home right away without having accomplished the purpose of our visit to the shops; we left without buying anything.

There was another incident with a Greek Orthodox man and a Mattawan. The man was around his sixties. He had just got off of his work and he was going to take his car to drive home. He was walking during the time that Muslims were praying. The policeman ordered the man to fall on his knees and start doing salaam. He wanted to make him fall on his knees and pray to a God he did not believe. I had many times seen Muslims, when it is time to pray, forgetting about everything they are doing at the

moment and start kneeling in the middle of the street. For them it is a ceremonious act of difference or obeisance, especially a low bow performed while trying to reach the floor with the forehead. It is a respectful ceremonial greeting performed especially in Islamic countries. The man didn't obey to the policeman's command. "I'm a very religious sixty-year-old man. I have never changed my religion and my beliefs before and certainly I'm not going to do it now". He ended up in jail for a couple of days because he disobeyed.

Another family friend had been caught at a party where he was drinking alcohol and in the company of a lot of women. Despite the fact that prostitution is illegal there one can find a lot of prostitutes. This man was one of those who were organizing the party; the others were some of those with power in Saudi Arabia. He ended up in jail and few months later they expelled him from the country. Now he is blacklisted for as long as he is alive, something for which he should be grateful, since he avoided conviction to death by using the power of his Arab friends. For the rest of them who were organizing the party nobody said or did anything since they were relatives of the king, that is, they were those who were establishing and applying the laws. Therefore they passed in silence their involvement. The law against prostitution applies only to common people, but common people are not aware of that discrimination.

On another night the Mattawan approached us again. We were out for shopping as usual. It was extremely hot that night, so my sister and I were wearing sleeveless shirts and shorts. We were seven and six years old respectively. "The way your daughters are dressed is very tempting for us males. You should have them dressed more appropriately, according to the laws and regulations of this country. You might be a foreigner, but this does not mean that you can do whatever you want. If you cannot respect my country and if you cannot live according to the laws of this country, then you better leave by yourself, or I will expel you", the Mattawan said to my father. They considered us females instead of children even though we were both about 6 years old. From that night on, as strange and irritating it was for us, we began wearing long-sleeved, long dresses above our clothes, in order to hide every naked part of our body that our childish, summer clothes didn't cover. Pornography and prostitution are big issues for Saudi Arabia. I always remember my parents behaving as a married couple at home but never showing their feelings at public places. Also movies that we watched were manipulated, by cutting scenes; magazines that we bought were scrutinized and controlled through censorship. The authority is very strict and very careful with issues that promote sexuality. This enabled them to control the public flow of conversations and the behavior of their people, by restricting certain attitudes and offering no models to follow toward the unwanted behavior. And one of the duties a Mattawan has is to prevent people from exposing publicly parts of their bodies, to prevent pornography, and sexual harassment. Do they succeed in this? Had they succeeded, would have so many males with sick intensions especially toward children? I experienced such intention first hand

I remember those two scary eyes staring once at my face and once at my childish body, the ugly face that was close to mine, and the hand that was trying to touch me. I remember his disgusting and sick desire to touch my seven-year-old body. At the same time I remember his dirty hand on my tiny body and his dirty look staring at me, directly into my eyes. His look was telling me "don't shout, don't say anything or you are in big

trouble". I was trying to shout, to scream, to call for help, to let my parents know. They were only few feet away. I fearfully wondered what was going on, but the words wouldn't come out of my mouth. The eyes, the face, the hand were there and I was opening my mouth struggling to scream but my voice was betraying me while it was unable to go beyond my mouth, and therefore it was only echoing in my ears again, and again, and again. All these lasted for only few seconds but for me it was like hours. All of a sudden the word "Nikoleta" sounded and everything changed. It was my mother calling me to show me something, and saving me, at the same time, from that brutal Arab man. He was scared to death at the sound of my name. I felt such a relief. Both of my parents turned at me and I ran by their side where I felt safe and secure. "Are you okay honey?" my mother asked me. I never told them that story. I never told them that, while we were in that store that night, I went to see an album on a shelf that ignited my childish curiosity and then that disgusting man came by my side. I am very grateful I haven't told them, since we were in Saudi Arabia, a country where I could not know how justice would be considered for foreigners and Christians who do not have rights. Had my father found out about that incident he would have 'killed' the Arab, and then be in trouble. I'm grateful for the way things turned out, since nothing happened to me. I will never forget that experience.

If anybody would have asked me now, almost fourteen years after I last saw Saudi Arabia, "do you want to live in that country again?" I would say "no" without second thoughts. It's different when you grow up. As a grown up I have interests and get involved with activities that are very different from those I dealt with as a child. Among other things I want to have girlfriends and boyfriends, go to clubs, drink alcohol, wear whatever I want and feel free, feel human. I guess, though, that I would like to visit that country one more time, out of curiosity, just to see if anything has changed after all these years. I would also like to know how it is to face such an unusual world from the lenses of an adult instead of a child's viewpoint, so that I understand more fully why my parents were scared about their going back there again. But I have to admit that I feel so lucky for having the opportunity to live in Saudi Arabia. Together with the bad memories, I have a lot of great ones as well.

Even if I wanted to visit Saudi Arabia, the authorities there wouldn't let me anyway, because I am adult now, I am older than eighteen years old, and single, which means that they would perceive that I can easily seduce males there. What if I wanted to visit my father there? Isn't it a good reason to visit that country? No, it is not. It would have been for me, if he was still there, but not for the Arabs. My dad recently had an offer to work for another Greek company in Saudi Arabia, but one of the drawbacks for him to do that was the concern of both of my parents "how our children will be able to visit us there, since they are adults and they will not allow them to come?" I would never like to feel that I couldn't see my parents, either.

When I came to Chicago for graduate studies my impression was that I came to a place where everything was peaceful, quiet and calm. I only change my mind when I am in Chicago downtown. The green color that was spreading everywhere was joy for the eyes, mind, and soul. Although everywhere was busy the calmness was still obvious. I was in a place where everyone was just caring about one's own business, without imposing on others' business. How is it possible anyway to care about others when, being so busy all day long, we don't have time to be sociable, open-up to others or do

something else other than working, studying, cleaning, earning and spending money, and being materialistic. On the other hand I felt safe here, since I was in the most powerful country of the world, whereas in Cyprus daily life is a routine, but you can never forget not even for a moment that few miles away Turks occupy one third of the country and they are threatening us that they can occupy the whole island whenever they decide to do so. I thought that nobody could harm America and that everybody is, or pretends to be, America's friend. That's what I thought, without acknowledging what the next day can bring.

Now I'm counting exactly one year, one month, one week and one day after my coming in the United States. September 11, 2001.

That morning I didn't want to leave my bed, but the sound of the alarm reminded me that I might not have school, but I have work. The time was 7:00 o'clock when I woke up. I had 30 minutes to get ready and leave for my work. I looked out of the window and I knew that the weather was going to be great.

At 7:40 I got into my car. I turned the radio on, knowing that the music was going to make me feel better. Fifteen minutes later the spokesman interrupted the program to announce that a plane flew into the World Trade Center in New York. "Wow" I thought, "at least I hope it's not a passenger plane". Fifteen minutes later the spokesman announced that another aircraft flew into the second tower of the World Trade Center. Oh Jesus! Is this a joke? Two aircrafts flew into each of the Twin Tower Buildings, within fifteen minutes. Is something wrong with the Control Tower? Did they give wrong directions or information to the pilots? I hoped that that wasn't the case; otherwise more planes would crash on the buildings of the area. Certainly it wasn't a matter of the weather since the weather was great: clear, sunny weather.

When, twenty minutes later, another airplane crushed into the Pentagon, I realized what all this was about. All these events weren't coincidental. Terrorists were attacking America. After a few minutes one more plane crushed while flying over Pennsylvania. Within few seconds the situation, that morning, changed. America had to confront terrorism. Who were the terrorists, how many were they, what did they want, how far could they go? The orders of the Official Authorities were clear: "No airplane will fly to or from any airport in America. Evacuate all the governmental buildings. Be alert until we find out who these people are".

It took me an hour and a half to go to my work. All this time I didn't know if anybody was aware of what was going on. I was trying to distinguish the expressions of other people who were in their cars at the moment. I wanted to call people and inform them: at my work, my brother, my boyfriend, and my friends. "Do you know what is going on? How far can this go? Is this a war? What shall we do?" I wasn't far away from the building where I work. The cars on the ramp to Racine Avenue were stacked. I had not remembered so much traffic on that ramp. I had never seen so much traffic on the highways. Never before had it taken me an hour and a half to get to my work. I tried to call somebody...anybody, but all the circuits were busy. What's going on? Are all these events and facts a coincidence or is it something serious, much more serious than I think? What is going on? Everything seemed different. Despite the happenings the roads seemed so quiet. Despite the alertness everything and everyone seemed so peaceful. Everything looked like it was a movie in fast forward.

I think my whole life passed in front of my eyes within two seconds. Bad memories came in my mind. It was like the war of the 1974 in Cyprus was reviving. I wasn't born back then, but every year on that day it's like I experience the events all over again.

Finally, I got to my work. It took only few seconds to realize that everybody was aware of what happened a few hours ago. Everybody was panicked and shocked. People were walking all around the building. Some were on their cellular phones. Others were talking in the hallways. Some others seemed to be lost in their thoughts. The building seemed to be alive and noisy as well as dead and dumb, at the same time. I was trying to figure out who of those who were passing by me had a story to tell for the death of their loved ones, and who were sad just because they were sharing the sadness and the tragedy of their fellow citizens, by looking them deep in their eyes.

At the office where I work, my colleagues were gathered in the reception area. The radio was playing loud enough so that people could be informed for the happenings. Some of my colleagues were watching the news in the TV room. Some others were discussing the events. Others were on the phone with relatives or friends trying to explain what had happened, or to check if they were okay or just to mollify the pain in their souls. Some of them were in contact with loving persons in New York to find out about their physical condition, hoping that they wouldn't hear any bad news. In the office nobody could work. We found out that they were evacuating main buildings in Chicago downtown. All of the governmental offices and most of the schools, shopping malls and other shops were closed. It was going to be a very long day for all.

Nobody could believe what happened. Nobody could believe that such a beautiful day could have brought such a tragedy.

Now things have calmed down. A few hours ago, though, we were witnesses of, most probably, one of the worst terrorism act in the history of the United States. We will never forget the crush of the four airplanes, the collapse of the World Trade Center, the Twin Towers, the bombardment of the Pentagon, the evacuation of main buildings all over the country and, the most important, the death of thousand of innocent victims. This day will be one of those black days, which marked with blood the history of the world and the memories of the people. Everyone will have something to say about this day and yet everyone will remain silent.

The day is over, but the tragedy will always be here, alive, in our memories. God bless the victims of the terrorism and their families. God bless each one of us. Everybody now is a different person, more thoughtful and thankful for being alive, for not being in those buildings or in those airplanes. For us all who are still alive today's day was a great lesson and a reminder that life is too short. We should appreciate life and enjoy it as much as possible. We should appreciate and enjoy every little thing in our life. It was a reminder that we should tell our significant others that we love them and we care about them.

It was also a reminder that America is not the only place on the world or that America is not the whole world. What America goes through now is something familiar, in one way or another, to numerous other countries. What America goes through now, is what my country goes through every day, for some twenty-nine years now. I'm not talking about the way things happened or what happened; I'm talking about feelings, feelings of patriotism, sadness, insecurity, bitterness, and vulnerability, as well as wondering "why". At the same time all these feelings, the unification of people, the

concern about a common thing, the blood donations, and other actions and activities prove that the humane side of people has never been lost, even though the evil side will always exist.

The whole world looks like a small neighborhood. What happened on the 11th of September is not only a big issue for America. The whole world is concerned and afraid that we are close to another World War, World War III. May the issue be that we should stop and think about the others? Who are those others? Who are the terrorists and what do they want? Are they maniacs or psychopaths? To them what they did was very logical, because these are their beliefs and what they were raised for. To them what they did was completely reasonable; they did it for a reason, for their own reasons. And how can you run after them or seek justice when they have some other value system, when for them injustice is justice and inequality is equality? What can you do when they are willing to die for their insane beliefs? To us this is insanity. To them our sanity may be insane. But were they trained to be evil, or were they responding to evil in whatever way they could?

At the same time another question is whether the terrorists can see or are willing to see the point of view of others. Maybe not, because they have been raised for a purpose and thus they act only toward that purpose. But this may be true for us, too. And if this is the case, then they can only see up to that purpose and they use every means to accomplish it; they cannot see beyond that point or think otherwise. Who is the enemy then? And in fighting against it what can we accomplish? Are we trying to kill all the terrorists that exist in this world, and, even if we do, who can guarantee that others will not appear in double, from the spore these terrorists plant, like the heads of the Hydra of Lerna? Or are we trying to change the value system of these people who grew up in a whole different world, which, if we could do, would it be just and would it respect their human rights? But do they respect other people's rights, or are they concerned with human rights and pose questions to themselves regarding morals and rationales? How can you try to change the beliefs and perspectives of those people who come from an Islamic country and who most likely have experienced and embrace their country's beliefs? Can dialogue solve the problem? It would be purposeful and valuable to try to answer questions of this nature, but it would be naïve, at the same time, to think that there is a simple answer to all these questions.

Sometimes I think to myself where are other countries at these moments when America needs help? Maybe other countries offered their help and nobody told us either on purpose or out of negligence. Or maybe they did not offer their help indeed. And again if this is the case there must be a reason and a logical explanation for this. But why? If America gets involved in other countries' matters trying to help them out, why are they so ungrateful and why do they not help America in return? It could be the fact that they view things from a different viewpoint than America does. The help that America offers to other countries might be help from America's perspective, and destruction from others' perspectives. Involvement exists because of interests without meaning that both countries will benefit out of it. Could it be that everyone acts for one's own interest whenever there is opportunity, without being concerned with others' interests? Or could it be that other countries theorize that actions are being taken against them and then they have to find a solution by their own, fighting at the same time against the others who try to take advantage of the situation? It could also be that other countries

think that it is America's turn to feel the pain, the injustice, the despair, and the helplessness, which they have felt themselves some time ago, or they still feel. Other countries may very well be familiar with the above feelings, whereas America was always helping from the outside. Or it could be that they want to help but they cannot either because they do not have the power or because they think that America, powerful as it is, can help itself out of this.

Kevin's story may prove useful in offering us another perspective on the issue. Kevin serves the Special Forces Confronting Devastations. On July 31, 2002 Kevin told me, "during the sad events of 9/11 in America, Greece, as a member of European Union, offered to help by sending out to New York experts in confronting devastation. A total of six thousand men would be sent from the European Union (EU). Greece was to join with sixty men. This help would be sent as a unified force from EU, rather than from each European country separately. A meeting point for all teams from the different countries—members of EU was determined. But the very last moment we were notified that America declared that no help is needed from other countries, because they already had enough help sent to New York from its different states. One of the difficulties we had to face, if America would have accepted the help, was how to get there since all flights to and from America were banned. I believe that America rejected any help from other countries in order not to lose its prestige, since, according to the general notion, America, powerful as it is, is the country that helps out all other countries in need, rather than the one that gets help; it has the means and power to help itself and face all dangers and difficulties".

Does it matter? Do we care? It does matter, and we do care because we are all into this. Or are we in the middle of it? Are we trapped somehow and somewhere? With all these forces directing us, are we all marionettes in the hands of few powerful people who act from above? Are we the objects and the means for those with the authority to accomplish their sick plans and personal interests to gain personal profit and glory? Was that it in the case of Cyprus twenty-nine years ago, and still is, and is that it in the case of America now? Maybe some people know what really happened, as well as what will happen next, and we don't. Maybe they had known in the first place and we didn't. Something is being cooked from above for us, without us taking part in it, but we have to eat it anyway, either we like it or not.

I feel very sorry for what happened in New York. I'm still trying to make sense about what happened as others do. But can we make sense of the senseless? I'm trying to predict what will happen next, as others do, struggling to take away from my mind the thought of another World War. I'm trying to help in my own way, as others do. But I'm afraid for what is going on out there without me being aware of it. I'm afraid for all the things that will be done "for me" without me being present. What I can do is to hope and pray for the best. The other thing I can do is to protest, and act.

But my obligation as an educator is to investigate and learn. My obligation through teaching is to help my students see who they are and who they want to become; to influence their lives; to help them create their lives; to help new generations meet the world; to help humanity remake itself (Schubert, 1999). Is to shut the windows of my classroom and continue with the topic that I am supposed to teach the best way to confront what is going on in the world? Or is to stand in front of the window of my classroom together with my students, to turn on the radio and the television, and read the

newspaper the best way to deal with it? (Page, 2001). As U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige announced on September 14, 2001, "As adults, we must offer [children] our undivided attention and unequivocal support. All adults should be concerned about how well the children in their lives understand what has taken place, to separate fact from fiction and to establish a sense of safety. There are simple things adults can do—but the most important is to listen to and talk to the children in their lives. They also need to watch for signs of unusual behavior and take steps to limit exposure to television and Internet imagery" (Paige, 2001).

What I need to do, as an educator, is to allow my students to participate in the world in order to understand that they are part of it and that with their actions affect the humanity and can help the world become a better place. It is the only way to help them become good and conscious citizens, and prevent future acts of terrorism. My obligation is to teach issues of violence at school. Together, inspired from everyday life incidents, we must give the message that violence is bad. In many cases we will have to deal with children who have grown up in war zones. Many of them may break down and have flashbacks of their homelands and of the countless horrors they have witnessed in their short lives. But can teachers handle this? I must search, investigate, and learn together with my students. Together we shall come to understand that not all people who are different from us are bad. They need to feel free to express their feelings and emotions and learn from them and from each other. I need to use curriculum in a way that will help my students understand the other, learn to respect and embrace difference and diversity and learn from it instead of judging it. It is from diversity that we form a shared identity among ourselves, and we are enabled to live in community with people who do not look like us. In this way they will understand that there is no single true or a unique answer to what is going on in the world, rather we give the answers, each one gives different answers, according to our backgrounds and experiences. And each of us is responsible to judge whether a certain answer is good enough for ourselves and for humanity or if we need to investigate more and explore another answer, another possibility. Schubert's wondering is of a high consideration and one that should guide our thoughts to produce further worthwhile questions: "How do I help students, others, and my self understand the ethical implications of worldwide terrorism, hatred, revenge, and violence (implicitly and explicitly) and its educational implications that require hope for and faith in humanity? Without warrant for such faith and hope, how can we justifiably ask what I have often called the basic curriculum question: What is worth knowing, experiencing, doing, needing, being, sharing, being, becoming, overcoming, contributing, and more? Without such justification, what do we say about Shakespeare's great existential and ethical dilemma: 'To be or not to be…?'" (Schubert, 2001). Through development of critical thinking students, and future citizens, can they judge if something is good or evil, if it is right or wrong. Through critical thinking they will be able to distinguish good news, programs, activities and bad ones. As an educator I am responsible to help my students make the world a better place. This is probably the best action I can take. And it is not just I or just you; it is all of us, because we, educators, "teach to change lives" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 277).

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